

A Birthmother's Story

Fifty-one years ago this coming September I surrendered my son, Richard Lawrence, for adoption. It was a dreadful decision to have to make but, given the mores of the day, it seemed the only possibility for my son to have the blessings of an intact and loving family.

Luckily for me and for him, he was adopted into just such a home...a home where two more adopted siblings were brought on board and where, thanks to life's vicissitudes, there were many half and step siblings too! It was a rich and chaotic home front. Life was not without its struggles but life was good.

My life went on too. Seven years after Richard was born I married a loving and understanding man, John. We went on to have two sons, Michael Sean and Keith Sexton. But life was not complete. During those early years of raising our two sons I was in a constant state of bewilderment...wondering how I could have given up my first born son and wondering how he was...or even *if* he was. A birth mother has no way of knowing if the child she surrendered is well or happy or alive. What kind of mother was I to have given away my child?! Even as I loved and cherished my two sons, Richard's absence from our lives seemed all the more sad and profound.

But it wasn't until 1976, when I met Pam Hasegawa, an adoptee searching for her birth mother, that I heard there was such a thing as searching ... such a thing as a reunion! The day I heard Pam's story was the beginning of a new road...a new life: one which allowed me to dream of the day Richard would be old enough for me to look for him; one in which I could hold the idea of him in my mind with a sense, not of our separation, but of our connection. I was, after all, his birth mother, and one

day I might be able to tell him how difficult it had been for me to give him up. How, in fact, it had been an act of love.

In 1982 I had that opportunity. Our beginnings were a bit uncertain and full of missteps. But we have it now! We've been in a 31-year reunion full of awe and wonder. Sadly, Richard's adoptive parents are both deceased but his adoptive step-dad and mom, as well as his many adoptive siblings and a very Favorite Aunt Barbara, are all as much a part of our lives as those who came with our family package of four. And what would our lives be without knowing and loving Richard's beautiful wife, Korinne, and their children, Sarah, Jenna, Patrick and Madeleine? Or without the bonds between Richard and his brother, Michael Sean, his wife, Randi and their two daughters, Leah and Hanna, and with his brother Keith and his partner, Elisa?

I love taking pictures of our three boys together. But perhaps the best pictures of all are the ones where we squeeze *everyone* in. It's a huge, unruly mob, but when you really squeeze, you can do it.

Patricia O'Brien. 2/17/13

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N.B. There is no doubt in my mind that open records are vital in assuring that adoptees have access to the information that could provide them with the vital links to their beginnings and to the potential richness and benefits this information holds. This right trumps anybody's claim to privacy and secrecy. It's important to realize that lies, confusion, and separation are the sad and inevitable results of hiding the truth.

Forty-nine years ago this year I surrendered my son, Richard, for adoption. It was a dreadful decision to have to make but, given the mores of the day, it seemed the only possibility for my son to access an intact and loving family.

Luckily for me and for him, he was adopted into just such a home, where, I later learned, two more adopted siblings were brought on board and where, thanks to life's vicissitudes, there were many half and step siblings!

My life went on too. Seven years after Richard was born I married John, who loved me regardless of my difficult story . We went on to have two sons, Michael and Keith . But life was not complete. During those early years of raising our two sons I was in a constant state of bewilderment, wondering how I could have given up my first born son and wondering how he was...or even *if* he was. A birth mother has no way of knowing if the child she surrendered is well or happy or alive. What kind of mother was I to have given away my child?! Even as I loved and cherished my two sons, Richard's absence from our lives seemed all the more sad and profound.

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of awe and wonder. Sadly, Richard's adoptive parents are both deceased but his step-dad and mom, as well as his many adoptive siblings and one very Favorite Aunt Barbara, are all as much a part of our lives as those who came with our family package of four.

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